

Speech: “This Council has a responsibility to sustain the peace won in Europe seven decades ago.”

Thank you Mr President, Mr Minister, and thank you to our three Secretary-Generals for their briefings today.

The three organisations – the United Nations, the OSCE, and the European Union – are all playing a crucial role to preserve peace and security in Europe, and we are grateful for all of the work that you do.

Everything that we do in this Council has come about as a direct result of conflict in Europe. Over seven decades on from the Second World War, we should be proud that Europeans now enjoy a level of stability and prosperity that would have been unthinkable to our grandparents’ generation.

And as we heard so clearly in the session on Ukraine earlier this month, instability and insecurity persists in Europe. The borders of Europe are threatened today in a way not seen since the Cold War. The territorial integrity of your country, Mr President, has been flagrantly violated leaving up to 10,000 dead, with millions displaced.

At the heart of this disregard for sovereignty lies the Russian Federation and its world view that thinks Moscow’s interests can and should prevail over the sovereign and democratic choices of independent countries. It’s a world view illustrated by Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and continued support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine.

Only a few days ago Russia recognised passports from the so-called “People’s Republics” in Donbas under the guise of humanitarian assistance for a conflict which Russia itself instigated. A more appropriate response would be for Russia to honour its commitments under the Minsk agreements, including by withdrawing its troops and equipment from Ukraine; and using its influence over the separatists to implement the ceasefire and heavy weapons withdrawal agreement. Until all such commitments are met in full, Russia will remain under sanctions from the EU and G7 states.

Put simply, we can’t stand idly by in the face of such aggression. This Council has a responsibility to sustain the peace won in Europe seven decades ago, to ensure that the rules based international order, most notably the UN Charter, is respected and upheld by all countries. We have a responsibility to ensure that wars waged across battlefields are ended through dialogue pursued across tables.

The three organisations we’ve heard from today are playing a vital role in those efforts.

In the face of great odds and escalating violence, the OSCE is bravely

monitoring the line of contact in Ukraine. The UN is bringing vital aid and much needed relief to those suffering. And through sanctions, the EU is bringing pressure to bear on Russia to meet its commitments under the Minsk agreement.

But these organisations can't do it alone. All sides must step up and make a ceasefire a reality, implementing their Minsk agreements in full.

Sadly, the need for a peaceful, political settlement extends far beyond the borders of Ukraine. In the interests of time I won't mention every single conflict in Europe – the flashing light, after all, is meant to be a sign to stop, not an encouragement to keep going. So let me just mention a few of the other conflicts. In Georgia, the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain unresolved, with Russian pressure showing no signs of dissipating. In Moldova, it is long past time for a comprehensive, peaceful settlement of the Transnistria conflict; based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Moldova with a special status for the Transnistria Region.

In Nagorno-Karabakh, a peaceful settlement also remains elusive owing to a high level of mistrust and a lack of any political will to compromise. And we support the efforts of the Co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group.

Across the continent, the United Kingdom will continue to be a force for peace in Europe, through our membership of NATO, the OSCE and, of course, this Council. Our own security has long depended on the strong partnerships of the Euro-Atlantic area, and so we are committed to strengthening those partnerships further, including by maintaining the NATO target of spending 2% of our economy on defence, and I strongly encourage all NATO allies to meet that target.

NATO has responded in a coherent, comprehensive and measured fashion to Russia's destabilisation and provocation. It has modernised its deterrence and defence posture, as a balanced response to the instability and insecurity Russia has attempted to sow, while also being open to dialogue with Russia.

Mr President,

Three years on from the Maidan protests, we speak clearly in this Chamber today to reaffirm our total support for the principles of territorial integrity and sovereignty as outlined in the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. We speak clearly to say that we do not, we will not recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea. I am proud to do so again today on behalf of the United Kingdom.

Thank you.